THE LAMPLIGHTER

'If you talk of Murphy and Francis Moore, gentlemen,' said the lamplighter who was in the chair, 'I mean to say that neither of 'em ever had any more to do with the stars than Tom Grig had.'

'And what had HE to do with 'em?' asked the lamplighter who officiated as vice.

'Nothing at all,' replied the other; 'just exactly nothing at all.'

'Do you mean to say you don't believe in Murphy, then?' demanded the lamplighter who had opened the discussion.

'I mean to say I believe in Tom Grig,' replied the chairman. 'Whether I believe in Murphy, or not, is a matter between me and my conscience; and whether Murphy believes in himself, or not, is a matter between him and his conscience. Gentlemen, I drink your healths.'

The lamplighter who did the company this honour, was seated in the chimney-corner of a certain tavern, which has been, time out of mind, the Lamplighters' House of Call. He sat in the midst of a circle of lamplighters, and was the cacique, or chief of the tribe.

If any of our readers have had the good fortune to behold a lamplighter's funeral, they will not be surprised to learn that lamplighters are a strange and primitive people; that they rigidly adhere to old ceremonies and customs which have been handed down among them from father to son since the first public lamp was lighted out of doors; that they intermarry, and betroth their children in infancy; that they enter into no plots or conspiracies (for who ever heard of a traitorous lamplighter?); that they commit no crimes against the laws of their country (there being no instance of a murderous or burglarious lamplighter); that they are, in short,

notwithstanding their apparently volatile and restless character, a highly moral and reflective people: having among themselves as many traditional observances as the Jews, and being, as a body, if not as old as the hills, at least as old as the streets. It is an article of their creed that the first faint glimmering of true civilisation shone in the first street-light maintained at the public expense. They trace their existence and high position in the public esteem, in a direct line to the heathen mythology; and hold that the history of Prometheus himself is but a pleasant fable, whereof the true hero is a lamplighter.

'Gentlemen,' said the lamplighter in the chair, 'I drink your healths.'

'And perhaps, Sir,' said the vice, holding up his glass, and rising a little way off his seat and sitting down again, in token that he recognised and returned the compliment, 'perhaps you will add to that condescension by telling us who Tom Grig was, and how he came to be connected in your mind with Francis Moore, Physician.'

'Hear, hear, hear!' cried the lamplighters generally.

'Tom Grig, gentlemen,' said the chairman, 'was one of us; and it happened to him, as it don't often happen to a public character in our line, that he had his what-you-may-call-it cast.'

'His head?' said the vice.

'No,' replied the chairman, 'not his head.'

'His face, perhaps?' said the vice. 'No, not his face.' 'His legs?' 'No, not his legs.' Nor yet his arms, nor his hands, nor his feet, nor his chest, all of which were severally suggested.

'His nativity, perhaps?'

'That's it,' said the chairman, awakening from his thoughtful attitude at the suggestion. 'His nativity. That's what Tom had cast, gentlemen.'

'In plaster?' asked the vice.

'I don't rightly know how it's done,' returned the chairman. 'But I suppose it was.'

And there he stopped as if that were all he had to say; whereupon there arose a murmur among the company, which at length resolved itself into a request, conveyed through the vice, that he would go on. This being exactly what the chairman wanted, he mused for a little time, performed that agreeable ceremony which is popularly termed wetting one's whistle, and went on thus:

'Tom Grig, gentlemen, was, as I have said, one of us; and I may go further, and say he was an ornament to us, and such a one as only the good old times of oil and cotton could have produced. Tom's family, gentlemen, were all lamplighters.'

'Not the ladies, I hope?' asked the vice.

'They had talent enough for it, Sir,' rejoined the chairman, 'and would have been, but for the prejudices of society. Let women have their rights, Sir, and the females of Tom's family would have been every one of 'em in office. But that emancipation hasn't come yet, and hadn't then, and consequently they confined themselves to the bosoms of their families, cooked the dinners, mended the clothes, minded the children, comforted their husbands, and attended to the house-keeping generally. It's a hard thing upon the women, gentlemen, that they are limited to such a sphere of action as this; very hard.

'I happen to know all about Tom, gentlemen, from the circumstance of his uncle by his mother's side, having been my particular friend. His (that's Tom's uncle's) fate was a melancholy one. Gas was the death of him. When it was first talked of, he laughed. He wasn't angry; he laughed at the credulity of human nature. "They might as well talk," he says, "of laying on an everlasting succession of glow-worms;" and then he laughed again, partly at his joke, and partly at poor humanity.

'In course of time, however, the thing got ground, the experiment was made, and they lighted up Pall Mall. Tom's uncle went to see it. I've heard that he fell off his ladder fourteen times that night, from weakness, and

that he would certainly have gone on falling till he killed himself, if his last tumble hadn't been into a wheelbarrow which was going his way, and humanely took him home. "I foresee in this," says Tom's uncle faintly, and taking to his bed as he spoke - "I foresee in this," he says, "the breaking up of our profession. There's no more going the rounds to trim by daylight, no more dribbling down of the oil on the hats and bonnets of ladies and gentlemen when one feels in spirits. Any low fellow can light a gas-lamp. And it's all up." In this state of mind, he petitioned the government for - I want a word again, gentlemen - what do you call that which they give to people when it's found out, at last, that they've never been of any use, and have been paid too much for doing nothing?'

'Compensation?' suggested the vice.

'That's it,' said the chairman. 'Compensation. They didn't give it him, though, and then he got very fond of his country all at once, and went about saying that gas was a death-blow to his native land, and that it was a plot of the radicals to ruin the country and destroy the oil and cotton trade for ever, and that the whales would go and kill themselves privately, out of sheer spite and vexation at not being caught. At last he got right-down cracked; called his tobacco-pipe a gas-pipe; thought his tears were lamp-oil; and went on with all manner of nonsense of that sort, till one night he hung himself on a lamp-iron in Saint Martin's Lane, and there was an end of HIM.

'Tom loved him, gentlemen, but he survived it. He shed a tear over his grave, got very drunk, spoke a funeral oration that night in the watch-house, and was fined five shillings for it, in the morning. Some men are none the worse for this sort of thing. Tom was one of 'em. He went that very afternoon on a new beat: as clear in his head, and as free from fever as Father Mathew himself.

'Tom's new beat, gentlemen, was - I can't exactly say where, for that he'd never tell; but I know it was in a quiet part of town, where there were some queer old houses. I have always had it in my head that it must have been somewhere near Canonbury Tower in Islington, but that's a matter of opinion. Wherever it was, he went upon it, with a bran-new ladder, a white hat, a brown holland jacket and trousers, a blue neck-kerchief, and a sprig

of full- blown double wall-flower in his button-hole. Tom was always genteel in his appearance, and I have heard from the best judges, that if he had left his ladder at home that afternoon, you might have took him for a lord.

'He was always merry, was Tom, and such a singer, that if there was any encouragement for native talent, he'd have been at the opera. He was on his ladder, lighting his first lamp, and singing to himself in a manner more easily to be conceived than described, when he hears the clock strike five, and suddenly sees an old gentleman with a telescope in his hand, throw up a window and look at him very hard.

'Tom didn't know what could be passing in this old gentleman's mind. He thought it likely enough that he might be saying within himself, "Here's a new lamplighter - a good-looking young fellow - shall I stand something to drink?" Thinking this possible, he keeps quite still, pretending to be very particular about the wick, and looks at the old gentleman sideways, seeming to take no notice of him.

'Gentlemen, he was one of the strangest and most mysterious-looking files that ever Tom clapped his eyes on. He was dressed all slovenly and untidy, in a great gown of a kind of bed-furniture pattern, with a cap of the same on his head; and a long old flapped waistcoat; with no braces, no strings, very few buttons - in short, with hardly any of those artificial contrivances that hold society together. Tom knew by these signs, and by his not being shaved, and by his not being over-clean, and by a sort of wisdom not quite awake, in his face, that he was a scientific old gentleman. He often told me that if he could have conceived the possibility of the whole Royal Society being boiled down into one man, he should have said the old gentleman's body was that Body.

'The old gentleman claps the telescope to his eye, looks all round, sees nobody else in sight, stares at Tom again, and cries out very loud:

'"Hal-loa!"

'"Halloa, Sir," says Tom from the ladder; "and halloa again, if you come to that."

'"Here's an extraordinary fulfilment," says the old gentleman, "of a prediction of the planets."

'"Is there?" says Tom. "I'm very glad to hear it."

'"Young man," says the old gentleman, "you don't know me."

'"Sir," says Tom, "I have not that honour; but I shall be happy to drink your health, notwithstanding."

'"I read," cries the old gentleman, without taking any notice of this politeness on Tom's part - "I read what's going to happen, in the stars."

'Tom thanked him for the information, and begged to know if anything particular was going to happen in the stars, in the course of a week or so; but the old gentleman, correcting him, explained that he read in the stars what was going to happen on dry land, and that he was acquainted with all the celestial bodies.

'"I hope they're all well, Sir," says Tom, - "everybody."

'"Hush!" cries the old gentleman. "I have consulted the book of Fate with rare and wonderful success. I am versed in the great sciences of astrology and astronomy. In my house here, I have every description of apparatus for observing the course and motion of the planets. Six months ago, I derived from this source, the knowledge that precisely as the clock struck five this afternoon a stranger would present himself - the destined husband of my young and lovely niece - in reality of illustrious and high descent, but whose birth would be enveloped in uncertainty and mystery. Don't tell me yours isn't," says the old gentleman, who was in such a hurry to speak that he couldn't get the words out fast enough, "for I know better."

'Gentlemen, Tom was so astonished when he heard him say this, that he could hardly keep his footing on the ladder, and found it necessary to hold on by the lamp-post. There WAS a mystery about his birth. His mother had always admitted it. Tom had never known who was his father, and some people had gone so far as to say that even SHE was in doubt.

'While he was in this state of amazement, the old gentleman leaves the window, bursts out of the house-door, shakes the ladder, and Tom, like a ripe pumpkin, comes sliding down into his arms.

'"Let me embrace you," he says, folding his arms about him, and nearly lighting up his old bed-furniture gown at Tom's link. "You're a man of noble aspect. Everything combines to prove the accuracy of my observations. You have had mysterious promptings within you," he says; "I know you have had whisperings of greatness, eh?" he says.

'"I think I have," says Tom - Tom was one of those who can persuade themselves to anything they like - "I've often thought I wasn't the small beer I was taken for."

'"You were right," cries the old gentleman, hugging him again. "Come in. My niece awaits us."

'"Is the young lady tolerable good-looking, Sir?" says Tom, hanging fire rather, as he thought of her playing the piano, and knowing French, and being up to all manner of accomplishments.

'"She's beautiful!" cries the old gentleman, who was in such a terrible bustle that he was all in a perspiration. "She has a graceful carriage, an exquisite shape, a sweet voice, a countenance beaming with animation and expression; and the eye," he says, rubbing his hands, "of a startled fawn."

'Tom supposed this might mean, what was called among his circle of acquaintance, "a game eye;" and, with a view to this defect, inquired whether the young lady had any cash.

'"She has five thousand pounds," cries the old gentleman. "But what of that? what of that? A word in your ear. I'm in search of the philosopher's stone. I have very nearly found it - not quite. It turns everything to gold; that's its property."

'Tom naturally thought it must have a deal of property; and said that when the old gentleman did get it, he hoped he'd be careful to keep it in the family.

'"Certainly," he says, "of course. Five thousand pounds! What's five thousand pounds to us? What's five million?" he says. "What's five thousand million? Money will be nothing to us. We shall never be able to spend it fast enough."

'"We'll try what we can do, Sir," says Tom.

'"We will," says the old gentleman. "Your name?"

'"Grig," says Tom.

'The old gentleman embraced him again, very tight; and without speaking another word, dragged him into the house in such an excited manner, that it was as much as Tom could do to take his link and ladder with him, and put them down in the passage.

'Gentlemen, if Tom hadn't been always remarkable for his love of truth, I think you would still have believed him when he said that all this was like a dream. There is no better way for a man to find out whether he is really asleep or awake, than calling for something to eat. If he's in a dream, gentlemen, he'll find something wanting in flavour, depend upon it.

'Tom explained his doubts to the old gentleman, and said that if there was any cold meat in the house, it would ease his mind very much to test himself at once. The old gentleman ordered up a venison pie, a small ham, and a bottle of very old Madeira. At the first mouthful of pie and the first glass of wine, Tom smacks his lips and cries out, "I'm awake - wide awake;" and to prove that he was so, gentlemen, he made an end of 'em both.

'When Tom had finished his meal (which he never spoke of afterwards without tears in his eyes), the old gentleman hugs him again, and says, "Noble stranger! let us visit my young and lovely niece." Tom, who was a little elevated with the wine, replies, "The noble stranger is agreeable!" At which words the old gentleman took him by the hand, and led him to the parlour; crying as he opened the door, "Here is Mr. Grig, the favourite of the planets!"

'I will not attempt a description of female beauty, gentlemen, for every one of us has a model of his own that suits his own taste best. In this parlour that I'm speaking of, there were two young ladies; and if every gentleman present, will imagine two models of his own in their places, and will be kind enough to polish 'em up to the very highest pitch of perfection, he will then have a faint conception of their uncommon radiance.

'Besides these two young ladies, there was their waiting-woman, that under any other circumstances Tom would have looked upon as a Venus; and besides her, there was a tall, thin, dismal-faced young gentleman, half man and half boy, dressed in a childish suit of clothes very much too short in the legs and arms; and looking, according to Tom's comparison, like one of the wax juveniles from a tailor's door, grown up and run to seed. Now, this youngster stamped his foot upon the ground and looked very fierce at Tom, and Tom looked fierce at him - for to tell the truth, gentlemen, Tom more than half suspected that when they entered the room he was kissing one of the young ladies; and for anything Tom knew, you observe, it might be HIS young lady - which was not pleasant.

'"Sir," says Tom, "before we proceed any further, will you have the goodness to inform me who this young Salamander" - Tom called him that for aggravation, you perceive, gentlemen - "who this young Salamander may be?"

'"That, Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, "is my little boy. He was christened Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead. Don't mind him. He's a mere child."

'"And a very fine child too," says Tom - still aggravating, you'll observe - "of his age, and as good as fine, I have no doubt. How do you do, my man?" with which kind and patronising expressions, Tom reached up to pat him on the head, and quoted two lines about little boys, from Doctor Watts's Hymns, which he had learnt at a Sunday School.

'It was very easy to see, gentlemen, by this youngster's frowning and by the waiting-maid's tossing her head and turning up her nose, and by the young ladies turning their backs and talking together at the other end of the room, that nobody but the old gentleman took very kindly to the noble

stranger. Indeed, Tom plainly heard the waiting-woman say of her master, that so far from being able to read the stars as he pretended, she didn't believe he knew his letters in 'em, or at best that he had got further than words in one syllable; but Tom, not minding this (for he was in spirits after the Madeira), looks with an agreeable air towards the young ladies, and, kissing his hand to both, says to the old gentleman, "Which is which?"

'"This," says the old gentleman, leading out the handsomest, if one of 'em could possibly be said to be handsomer than the other - "this is my niece, Miss Fanny Barker."

'"If you'll permit me, Miss," says Tom, "being a noble stranger and a favourite of the planets, I will conduct myself as such." With these words, he kisses the young lady in a very affable way, turns to the old gentleman, slaps him on the back, and says, "When's it to come off, my buck?"

'The young lady coloured so deep, and her lip trembled so much, gentlemen, that Tom really thought she was going to cry. But she kept her feelings down, and turning to the old gentleman, says, "Dear uncle, though you have the absolute disposal of my hand and fortune, and though you mean well in disposing of 'em thus, I ask you whether you don't think this is a mistake? Don't you think, dear uncle," she says, "that the stars must be in error? Is it not possible that the comet may have put 'em out?"

'"The stars," says the old gentleman, "couldn't make a mistake if they tried. Emma," he says to the other young lady.

'"Yes, papa," says she.

'"The same day that makes your cousin Mrs. Grig will unite you to the gifted Mooney. No remonstrance - no tears. Now, Mr. Grig, let me conduct you to that hallowed ground, that philosophical retreat, where my friend and partner, the gifted Mooney of whom I have just now spoken, is even now pursuing those discoveries which shall enrich us with the precious metal, and make us masters of the world. Come, Mr. Grig," he says.

'"With all my heart, Sir," replies Tom; "and luck to the gifted Mooney, say I - not so much on his account as for our worthy selves!" With this sentiment, Tom kissed his hand to the ladies again, and followed him out; having the gratification to perceive, as he looked back, that they were all hanging on by the arms and legs of Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead, to prevent him from following the noble stranger, and tearing him to pieces.

'Gentlemen, Tom's father-in-law that was to be, took him by the hand, and having lighted a little lamp, led him across a paved court-yard at the back of the house, into a very large, dark, gloomy room: filled with all manner of bottles, globes, books, telescopes, crocodiles, alligators, and other scientific instruments of every kind. In the centre of this room was a stove or furnace, with what Tom called a pot, but which in my opinion was a crucible, in full boil. In one corner was a sort of ladder leading through the roof; and up this ladder the old gentleman pointed, as he said in a whisper:

'"The observatory. Mr. Mooney is even now watching for the precise time at which we are to come into all the riches of the earth. It will be necessary for he and I, alone in that silent place, to cast your nativity before the hour arrives. Put the day and minute of your birth on this piece of paper, and leave the rest to me."

'"You don't mean to say," says Tom, doing as he was told and giving him back the paper, "that I'm to wait here long, do you? It's a precious dismal place."

'"Hush!" says the old gentleman. "It's hallowed ground.
Farewell!"

'"Stop a minute," says Tom. "What a hurry you're in! What's in that large bottle yonder?"

'"It's a child with three heads," says the old gentleman; "and everything else in proportion."

'"Why don't you throw him away?" says Tom. "What do you keep such unpleasant things here for?"

'"Throw him away!" cries the old gentleman. "We use him constantly in astrology. He's a charm."

'"I shouldn't have thought it," says Tom, "from his appearance. MUST you go, I say?"

'The old gentleman makes him no answer, but climbs up the ladder in a greater bustle than ever. Tom looked after his legs till there was nothing of him left, and then sat down to wait; feeling (so he used to say) as comfortable as if he was going to be made a freemason, and they were heating the pokers.

'Tom waited so long, gentlemen, that he began to think it must be getting on for midnight at least, and felt more dismal and lonely than ever he had done in all his life. He tried every means of whiling away the time, but it never had seemed to move so slow. First, he took a nearer view of the child with three heads, and thought what a comfort it must have been to his parents. Then he looked up a long telescope which was pointed out of the window, but saw nothing particular, in consequence of the stopper being on at the other end. Then he came to a skeleton in a glass case, labelled, "Skeleton of a Gentleman - prepared by Mr. Mooney," - which made him hope that Mr. Mooney might not be in the habit of preparing gentlemen that way without their own consent. A hundred times, at least, he looked into the pot where they were boiling the philosopher's stone down to the proper consistency, and wondered whether it was nearly done. "When it is," thinks Tom, "I'll send out for six-penn'orth of sprats, and turn 'em into gold fish for a first experiment." Besides which, he made up his mind, gentlemen, to have a country-house and a park; and to plant a bit of it with a double row of gas-lamps a mile long, and go out every night with a French-polished mahogany ladder, and two servants in livery behind him, to light 'em for his own pleasure.

'At length and at last, the old gentleman's legs appeared upon the steps leading through the roof, and he came slowly down: bringing along with him, the gifted Mooney. This Mooney, gentlemen, was even more scientific in appearance than his friend; and had, as Tom often declared upon his word and honour, the dirtiest face we can possibly know of, in this imperfect state of existence.

'Gentlemen, you are all aware that if a scientific man isn't absent in his mind, he's of no good at all. Mr. Mooney was so absent, that when the old gentleman said to him, "Shake hands with Mr. Grig," he put out his leg. "Here's a mind, Mr. Grig!" cries the old gentleman in a rapture. "Here's philosophy! Here's rumination! Don't disturb him," he says, "for this is amazing!"

'Tom had no wish to disturb him, having nothing particular to say; but he was so uncommonly amazing, that the old gentleman got impatient, and determined to give him an electric shock to bring him to - "for you must know, Mr. Grig," he says, "that we always keep a strongly charged battery, ready for that purpose." These means being resorted to, gentlemen, the gifted Mooney revived with a loud roar, and he no sooner came to himself than both he and the old gentleman looked at Tom with compassion, and shed tears abundantly.

'"My dear friend," says the old gentleman to the Gifted, "prepare him."

'"I say," cries Tom, falling back, "none of that, you know. No preparing by Mr. Mooney if you please."

'"Alas!" replies the old gentleman, "you don't understand us. My friend, inform him of his fate. - I can't."

'The Gifted mustered up his voice, after many efforts, and informed Tom that his nativity had been carefully cast, and he would expire at exactly thirty-five minutes, twenty-seven seconds, and five- sixths of a second past nine o'clock, a.m., on that day two months.

'Gentlemen, I leave you to judge what were Tom's feelings at this announcement, on the eve of matrimony and endless riches. "I think," he says in a trembling voice, "there must be a mistake in the working of that sum. Will you do me the favour to cast it up again?" - "There is no mistake," replies the old gentleman, "it is confirmed by Francis Moore, Physician. Here is the prediction for to-morrow two months." And he showed him the page, where sure enough were these words - "The decease of a great person may be looked for, about this time."

'"Which," says the old gentleman, "is clearly you, Mr. Grig."

'"Too clearly," cries Tom, sinking into a chair, and giving one hand to the old gentleman, and one to the Gifted. "The orb of day has set on Thomas Grig for ever!"

'At this affecting remark, the Gifted shed tears again, and the other two mingled their tears with his, in a kind - if I may use the expression - of Mooney and Co.'s entire. But the old gentleman recovering first, observed that this was only a reason for hastening the marriage, in order that Tom's distinguished race might be transmitted to posterity; and requesting the Gifted to console Mr. Grig during his temporary absence, he withdrew to settle the preliminaries with his niece immediately.

'And now, gentlemen, a very extraordinary and remarkable occurrence took place; for as Tom sat in a melancholy way in one chair, and the Gifted sat in a melancholy way in another, a couple of doors were thrown violently open, the two young ladies rushed in, and one knelt down in a loving attitude at Tom's feet, and the other at the Gifted's. So far, perhaps, as Tom was concerned - as he used to say - you will say there was nothing strange in this: but you will be of a different opinion when you understand that Tom's young lady was kneeling to the Gifted, and the Gifted's young lady was kneeling to Tom.

'"Halloa! stop a minute!" cries Tom; "here's a mistake. I need condoling with by sympathising woman, under my afflicting circumstances; but we're out in the figure. Change partners, Mooney."

'"Monster!" cries Tom's young lady, clinging to the Gifted.

'"Miss!" says Tom. "Is THAT your manners?"

'"I abjure thee!" cries Tom's young lady. "I renounce thee. I never will be thine. Thou," she says to the Gifted, "art the object of my first and all-engrossing passion. Wrapt in thy sublime visions, thou hast not perceived my love; but, driven to despair, I now shake off the woman and avow it. Oh, cruel, cruel man!" With which reproach she laid her head upon the

Gifted's breast, and put her arms about him in the tenderest manner possible, gentlemen.

'"And I," says the other young lady, in a sort of ecstasy, that made Tom start - "I hereby abjure my chosen husband too. Hear me, Goblin!" - this was to the Gifted - "Hear me! I hold thee in the deepest detestation. The maddening interview of this one night has filled my soul with love - but not for thee. It is for thee, for thee, young man," she cries to Tom. "As Monk Lewis finely observes, Thomas, Thomas, I am thine, Thomas, Thomas, thou art mine: thine for ever, mine for ever!" with which words, she became very tender likewise.

'Tom and the Gifted, gentlemen, as you may believe, looked at each other in a very awkward manner, and with thoughts not at all complimentary to the two young ladies. As to the Gifted, I have heard Tom say often, that he was certain he was in a fit, and had it inwardly.

'"Speak to me! Oh, speak to me!" cries Tom's young lady to the Gifted.

'"I don't want to speak to anybody," he says, finding his voice at last, and trying to push her away. "I think I had better go. I'm - I'm frightened," he says, looking about as if he had lost something.

'"Not one look of love!" she cries. "Hear me while I declare - "

'"I don't know how to look a look of love," he says, all in a maze. "Don't declare anything. I don't want to hear anybody."

'"That's right!" cries the old gentleman (who it seems had been listening). "That's right! Don't hear her. Emma shall marry you to-morrow, my friend, whether she likes it or not, and SHE shall marry Mr. Grig."

'Gentlemen, these words were no sooner out of his mouth than Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead (who it seems had been listening too) darts in, and spinning round and round, like a young giant's top, cries, "Let her. Let her. I'm fierce; I'm furious. I give her leave. I'll never marry anybody after

this - never. It isn't safe. She is the falsest of the false," he cries, tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth; "and I'll live and die a bachelor!"

'"The little boy," observed the Gifted gravely, "albeit of tender years, has spoken wisdom. I have been led to the contemplation of woman-kind, and will not adventure on the troubled waters of matrimony."

'"What!" says the old gentleman, "not marry my daughter! Won't you, Mooney? Not if I make her? Won't you? Won't you?"

'"No," says Mooney, "I won't. And if anybody asks me any more,
I'll run away, and never come back again."

'"Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, "the stars must be obeyed. You have not changed your mind because of a little girlish folly - eh, Mr. Grig?"

'Tom, gentlemen, had had his eyes about him, and was pretty sure that all this was a device and trick of the waiting-maid, to put him off his inclination. He had seen her hiding and skipping about the two doors, and had observed that a very little whispering from her pacified the Salamander directly. "So," thinks Tom, "this is a plot - but it won't fit."

'"Eh, Mr. Grig?" says the old gentleman.

'"Why, Sir," says Tom, pointing to the crucible, "if the soup's nearly ready - "

'"Another hour beholds the consummation of our labours," returned the old gentleman.

'"Very good," says Tom, with a mournful air. "It's only for two months, but I may as well be the richest man in the world even for that time. I'm not particular, I'll take her, Sir. I'll take her."

'The old gentleman was in a rapture to find Tom still in the same mind, and drawing the young lady towards him by little and little, was joining their hands by main force, when all of a sudden, gentlemen, the crucible blows up, with a great crash; everybody screams; the room is filled with

smoke; and Tom, not knowing what may happen next, throws himself into a Fancy attitude, and says, "Come on, if you're a man!" without addressing himself to anybody in particular.

'"The labours of fifteen years!" says the old gentleman, clasping his hands and looking down upon the Gifted, who was saving the pieces, "are destroyed in an instant!" - And I am told, gentlemen, by-the-bye, that this same philosopher's stone would have been discovered a hundred times at least, to speak within bounds, if it wasn't for the one unfortunate circumstance that the apparatus always blows up, when it's on the very point of succeeding.

'Tom turns pale when he hears the old gentleman expressing himself to this unpleasant effect, and stammers out that if it's quite agreeable to all parties, he would like to know exactly what has happened, and what change has really taken place in the prospects of that company.

'"We have failed for the present, Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, wiping his forehead. "And I regret it the more, because I have in fact invested my niece's five thousand pounds in this glorious speculation. But don't be cast down," he says, anxiously - "in another fifteen years, Mr. Grig - "

"Oh!" cries Tom, letting the young lady's hand fall. "Were the stars very positive about this union, Sir?"

'"They were," says the old gentleman.

'"I'm sorry to hear it," Tom makes answer, "for it's no go, Sir."

'"No what!" cries the old gentleman.

'"Go, Sir," says Tom, fiercely. "I forbid the banns." And with these words - which are the very words he used - he sat himself down in a chair, and, laying his head upon the table, thought with a secret grief of what was to come to pass on that day two months.

'Tom always said, gentlemen, that that waiting-maid was the artfullest minx he had ever seen; and he left it in writing in this country when he

went to colonize abroad, that he was certain in his own mind she and the Salamander had blown up the philosopher's stone on purpose, and to cut him out of his property. I believe Tom was in the right, gentlemen; but whether or no, she comes forward at this point, and says, "May I speak, Sir?" and the old gentleman answering, "Yes, you may," she goes on to say that "the stars are no doubt quite right in every respect, but Tom is not the man." And she says, "Don't you remember, Sir, that when the clock struck five this afternoon, you gave Master Galileo a rap on the head with your telescope, and told him to get out of the way?" "Yes, I do," says the old gentleman. "Then," says the waiting- maid, "I say he's the man, and the prophecy is fulfilled." The old gentleman staggers at this, as if somebody had hit him a blow on the chest, and cries, "He! why he's a boy!" Upon that, gentlemen, the Salamander cries out that he'll be twenty-one next Lady-day; and complains that his father has always been so busy with the sun round which the earth revolves, that he has never taken any notice of the son that revolves round him; and that he hasn't had a new suit of clothes since he was fourteen; and that he wasn't even taken out of nankeen frocks and trousers till he was quite unpleasant in 'em; and touches on a good many more family matters to the same purpose. To make short of a long story, gentlemen, they all talk together, and cry together, and remind the old gentleman that as to the noble family, his own grandfather would have been lord mayor if he hadn't died at a dinner the year before; and they show him by all kinds of arguments that if the cousins are married, the prediction comes true every way. At last, the old gentleman being quite convinced, gives in; and joins their hands; and leaves his daughter to marry anybody she likes; and they are all well pleased; and the Gifted as well as any of them.

'In the middle of this little family party, gentlemen, sits Tom all the while, as miserable as you like. But, when everything else is arranged, the old gentleman's daughter says, that their strange conduct was a little device of the waiting-maid's to disgust the lovers he had chosen for 'em, and will he forgive her? and if he will, perhaps he might even find her a husband - and when she says that, she looks uncommon hard at Tom. Then the waiting-maid says that, oh dear! she couldn't abear Mr. Grig should think she wanted him to marry her; and that she had even gone so far as to refuse the last lamplighter, who was now a literary character (having set up as a bill-

sticker); and that she hoped Mr. Grig would not suppose she was on her last legs by any means, for the baker was very strong in his attentions at that moment, and as to the butcher, he was frantic. And I don't know how much more she might have said, gentlemen (for, as you know, this kind of young women are rare ones to talk), if the old gentleman hadn't cut in suddenly, and asked Tom if he'd have her, with ten pounds to recompense him for his loss of time and disappointment, and as a kind of bribe to keep the story secret.

'"It don't much matter, Sir," says Tom, "I ain't long for this world. Eight weeks of marriage, especially with this young woman, might reconcile me to my fate. I think," he says, "I could go off easy after that." With which he embraces her with a very dismal face, and groans in a way that might move a heart of stone - even of philosopher's stone.

'"Egad," says the old gentleman, "that reminds me - this bustle put it out of my head - there was a figure wrong. He'll live to a green old age - eighty-seven at least!"

'"How much, Sir?" cries Tom.

'"Eighty-seven!" says the old gentleman.

'Without another word, Tom flings himself on the old gentleman's neck; throws up his hat; cuts a caper; defies the waiting-maid; and refers her to the butcher.

'"You won't marry her!" says the old gentleman, angrily.

'"And live after it!" says Tom. "I'd sooner marry a mermaid with a small-tooth comb and looking-glass."

'"Then take the consequences," says the other.

'With those words - I beg your kind attention here, gentlemen, for it's worth your notice - the old gentleman wetted the forefinger of his right hand in some of the liquor from the crucible that was spilt on the floor,

and drew a small triangle on Tom's forehead. The room swam before his eyes, and he found himself in the watch- house.'

'Found himself WHERE?' cried the vice, on behalf of the company generally.

'In the watch-house,' said the chairman. 'It was late at night, and he found himself in the very watch-house from which he had been let out that morning.'

'Did he go home?' asked the vice.

'The watch-house people rather objected to that,' said the chairman; 'so he stopped there that night, and went before the magistrate in the morning. "Why, you're here again, are you?" says the magistrate, adding insult to injury; "we'll trouble you for five shillings more, if you can conveniently spare the money." Tom told him he had been enchanted, but it was of no use. He told the contractors the same, but they wouldn't believe him. It was very hard upon him, gentlemen, as he often said, for was it likely he'd go and invent such a tale? They shook their heads and told him he'd say anything but his prayers - as indeed he would; there's no doubt about that. It was the only imputation on his moral character that ever I heard of.'